

IN THE CLAIMS:

Kindly amend claims 1-16 as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm , ~~the microgel being prepared by a process comprising:~~

dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel,

causing the resultant mixture to form a gel, and

pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm .

2. (Currently Amended) ~~A microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm , the microgel being prepared by a~~ The process according to claim 1, wherein the comprising dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel, causing the resultant mixture to form a gel, and pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm are dissolved in the aqueous solvent.

3. (Currently Amended) ~~The process according to microgel of claim 2 1, wherein the viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel is one or more viscosity increasing compounds~~ hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel is one or more hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer agar, carrageenan gum, curdlan, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid.

4. (Currently Amended) ~~The microgel process according to of claim 1, wherein the viscosity increasing hydrophilic compound capable~~ incapable of forming a gel is one or more viscosity increasing hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, carrageenan, curdlan,

~~gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid~~ xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer.

5. (Currently Amended) The process according to microgel of claim 1, which has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa.s (B-type viscometer, 25°C) wherein the gel is pulverized into a microgel having a mean particle size of 1 to 300 µm.

6. (Currently Amended) ~~A~~ The process according to claim 1, for producing a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm, which process comprises dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a wherein the gel, causing the resultant mixture to form a gel, and pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa.s (B-type viscometer, 25°C).

7. (Currently Amended) A process for producing ~~a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm, an external composition, which said process comprising comprises:~~

dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel,

causing the resultant mixture to form a gel, and

pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm; and

mixing the microgel with a pharmaceutical ingredient and/or a salt to obtain the external composition.

8. (Currently Amended) ~~The external composition comprising a microgel of process according to claim 1~~ 7, wherein the pharmaceutical ingredient is one or more pharmaceutical ingredients selected from the group consisting of vitamins, anti-inflammatory agents, antibacterial agents, and whitening ingredients.

9. (Currently Amended) The ~~external composition of process according to claim 8~~ 7, further comprising a ~~wherein the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or a salt is one or more whitening ingredients selected from the group consisting of L-ascorbic acid, an L-ascorbic acid derivative, arbutin, glutathione, tranexamic acid, a tranexamic acid derivative, a placenta extract, and a vegetable extract exhibiting whitening effect.~~

10. (Currently Amended) The ~~external composition of process according to claim 9~~ 7, wherein the ~~pharmaceutical ingredient is a whitening ingredient~~ external composition contains 0.1 to 20 mass% of the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or the salt.

11. (Currently Amended) The ~~external composition to process according to claim 10~~ 7, wherein the ~~whitening ingredient is one or more whitening ingredients selected from the group consisting of L-ascorbic acid, an L-ascorbic acid derivative, arbutin, glutathione, tranexamic acid, a tranexamic acid derivative, a placenta extract, and a vegetable extract exhibiting whitening effect~~ external composition is a cosmetic composition.

12. (Currently Amended) The external composition of claim 9, wherein the amount of the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or the salt is 0.01-20 mass % of the total of the composition.

13. (Currently Amended) The ~~external composition of process according to claim 8~~ 7, ~~which is a cosmetic composition~~ wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel are dissolved in the aqueous solvent.

14. (Currently Amended) The ~~external composition of process according to claim 8~~ 7, ~~which is a hair dye~~ wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel is one or more hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, carrageenan, curdlan, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid.

15. (Currently Amended) The ~~microgel of~~ process according to claim 2 7, wherein the ~~hydrophilic viscosity increasing~~ compound ~~capable~~ incapable of forming a gel is one or more ~~hydrophilic viscosity increasing~~ compounds selected from the group consisting of ~~agar, carrageenan, eurdan, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid~~ xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer.

16. (Currently Amended) The ~~microgel of~~ process according to claim 2 7, ~~which has a~~ viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa.s (B-type viscometer, 25°C) wherein the gel is pulverized into a microgel having a mean particle size of 1 to 300 μm.

Kindly add new claim 17 as follows:

17. (New) The process according to claim 7, wherein the gel has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa.s (B-type viscometer, 25°C).